

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4605

April 27, 2022

Inspector General Michael J. Missal
Department of Veterans Affairs - Office of Inspector General
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Inspector General Missal,

We request that you investigate how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is implementing the VA Community Care Program as established by the VA MISSION Act of 2018 (Public Law 115-182), particularly in Virginia and West Virginia.

The VA Community Care Program provides qualifying veterans with the flexibility of receiving care in their community from local providers, rather than only at a VA health care facility. This program represents an exciting step toward ensuring that our nation's heroes have timely and convenient access to quality health care services. This option is especially important for our constituents who live in rural areas and oftentimes must drive a long distance to get to the nearest VA health facility.

Sadly, we understand that many veterans across Virginia and West Virginia have had trouble accessing community care services due to wait times and unannounced cancelled appointments. Online reporting verifies these complaints: the Charlottesville VA Clinic has an average wait time of 61 days for new patient primary care, the Hampton VA Medical Center has a 39 day wait for women's health, and the Lenore VA Clinic has a 46 day wait for new primary care patients.¹ These wait times are concerning since the VA MISSION Act established a standard of 20 days for primary care and 28 days for specialty care. Constituent testimonies are further corroborated by reports that VA practices are out of line with the law and regulations.²

In your investigation, we request that you include the following:

1. Is the VA complying with the eligibility requirements established in the VA MISSION Act?
2. Is the clinical appropriateness requirement – as seen in internal VA documents³ - a barrier to otherwise eligible veterans receiving community care?

¹ "Average Wait Times at Individual Facilities," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Accessed April 18, 2022, <https://www.accesstocare.va.gov/PWT/SearchWaitTimes>.

² Jill Castellano, "The Mission Act is supposed to help US veterans get health care outside the VA. For some, it's not working," USA Today News, Nov 2, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2021/11/01/mission-act-aid-veterans-healthcare-va-isnt-letting-it/8561618002/>.

³ "More evidence the VA is improperly delaying or denying community care to eligible veterans," Americans for Prosperity Foundation, <https://americansforprosperity.org/va-denying-delaying-care/>.

3. Does the “Best Medical Interest” standard provide administrators with more control over a veteran’s care than the health care provider or individual veteran?
4. Are appointments being cancelled without agreements of the veterans?
5. Does the VA keep adequate documentation of when veterans opt-out of community care?
6. To what degree is funding a factor for determining community care eligibility?
7. Are veterans adequately advised regarding their access to community care?
8. Are VA community care facilities adequately staffed for robust in-person health care services?

Recently, your office has examined some of these issues in a memorandum that found that “[Veterans Health Administration] has presented wait times to the public without clearly and consistently detailing the basis for their calculations.”⁴ While this memo did not identify intentional misconduct at the VA, its findings raise concerns about transparency and good faith efforts to help our veterans. It is important to build upon this work and examine the full range of possible barriers to the implementation of this law designed to give the best care to our nation’s heroes.

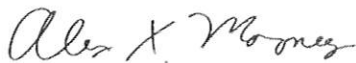
Sincerely,



Rep. Bob Good (VA-05)



Rep. Ben Cline (VA-06)



Rep. Alex Mooney (WV-02)



Rep. David B. McKinley, P.E. (WV-01)



Rep. H. Morgan Griffith (VA-09)



Rep. Rob Wittman (VA-01)



Rep. Carol D. Miller (WV-03)

⁴ “Concerns with Consistency and Transparency in the Calculation and Disclosure of Patient Wait Time Data,” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, April 7, 2022, <https://www.va.gov/oig/pubs/VAOIG-21-02761-125.pdf>.